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ABSTRACT

This book, one of a series, focuses on how stress affects children's learning. The message of the series urges parents and children to spend time together, talk about stories, and learn together. The first part of each book presents stories appropriate for varying grade levels, both younger children and those in grades three and four, and each book presents stories on a particular theme. The Read-along Stories in this book are: "The Monkey Tree" (as retold by B.K. Sharma and Sharon Pugh); "The Big Green Bean of White Oak Hollow" (Theo Elizabeth Gilchrist); and "Uncle Edgar and the President's Eye" (Linda Allen). On an accompanying audiotape, stories are performed as radio dramas, allowing children to read along. The second half of each book provides ideas and guidelines for parents, as well as activities and books for additional reading. This book suggests ways for reducing or preventing stress, including: (1) noticing that something is bothering the child and that you care to help him or her; (2) putting as much order in the child's life as possible; (3) giving the child regular encouragement about things done well; (4) helping the child build friendships that support him or her; (5) being a good listener; (6) giving hugs and signs of affection; and (7) reassuring the child. Sections include: Stress Affects Your Child's Learning; Signs of Stress in Children; Questions about Stress and School; and Activities to Help Cope with Stress. Contains 39 references. (EF)

ED 452 537

STRESS AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE



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PLUS Read-along Stories:

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The Monkey Tree

The Big Green Bean of White Oak Hollow

Uncle Edgar and the President's Eye

CS 217 397

**Guidance and fun
for parents and children, ages 4-9**

This book has a companion audio tape also entitled "Stress and School Performance." Occasionally there are directions on the tape that do not appear in the book or headings in the book that aren't spoken on the tape.



Parents and Children Together SERIES

Published by **ERIC** Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication
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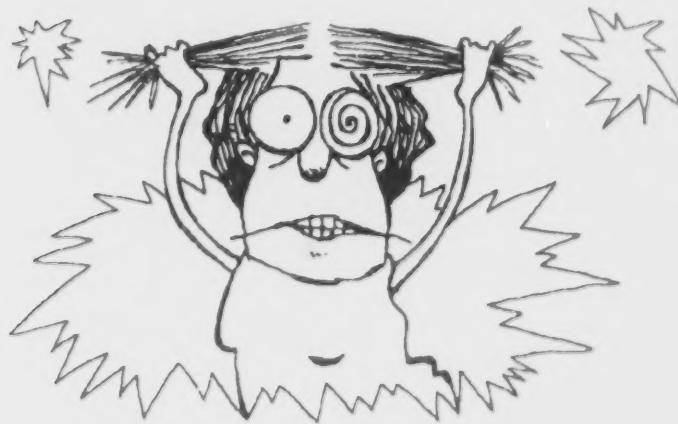
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Introduction

Get together with your children. Talk about stories and learn together. That's the message of this series of books, ***Parents and Children Together***.

You will find here several stories that you and your children can read together and talk about in a relaxed way. Some stories are more appropriate for younger children, some for children in grades three and four. Have fun with them but also use them as a way of guiding your child's thinking.

Before each story, you will be prompted to focus your attention. After the story, review some of the issues in a relaxed conversation. Please feel comfortable in making comments or asking questions when the two of you are reading a story together. Have fun along the way. The stories are performed as radio dramas on the accompanying audiotape. That gives your child a chance to read along with the voices on the tape.

In the second half of this book and on one side of the audio tape there are ideas and guidelines for the interested parent. On the topic of this particular volume you will find hints, practice activities, and books for further reading. If you want to use the tape as a way of preparing for reading with your child or in helping your child study, the tape gives you an opportunity to listen while you are driving or jogging.

For more ideas on any of the topics in this Series, visit ***www.kidscanlearn.com*** or ***http://eric.indiana.edu***



Getting Started

In this book we focus on Stress and School Performance and how stress affects your child's learning. On side B of the tape, we have three read-along stories. We encourage you to listen to these stories and to read them with your children so that they can participate in the excitement of story reading. Of course, your child can also listen to the stories alone, if you wish.

Before reading the story, talk about the title or things that might happen in the story. Then—after the story is finished—talk about it again. By the way, if in the middle of the story something funny or exciting or interesting happens, it's OK for you to stop the tape and discuss the event, or for you to ask your child questions such as "Is there really a Monkey God?" or "Who was Marie Antoinette?" These questions make your conversation about the story more natural and more valuable.



Part I
Read-along Stories



The Monkey Tree

Retold by B. K. Sharma and Sharon Pugh

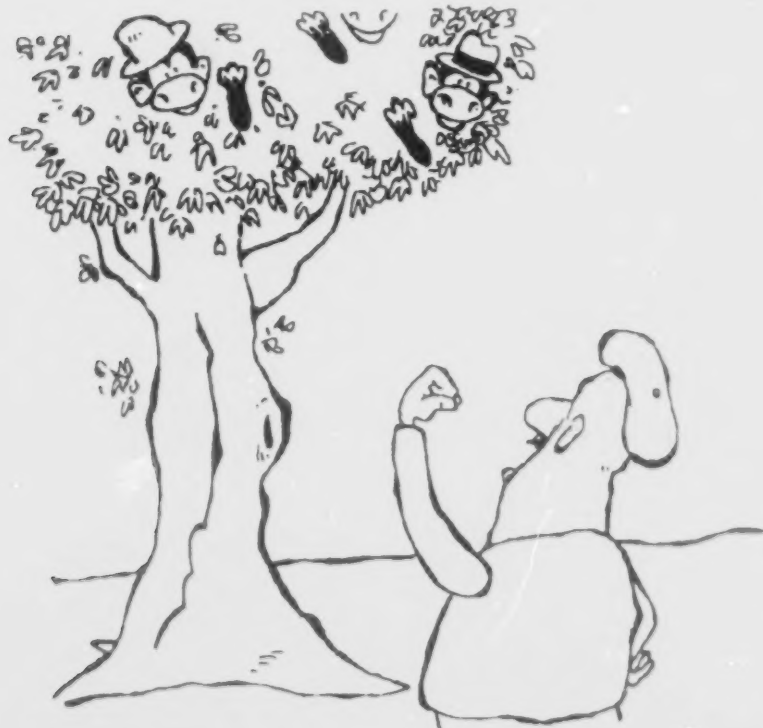
Things to Do *before* Reading the Story

Talk about all the things you know about monkeys. Think about monkeys you have seen at the zoo, in movies, or on TV. What are some of the clever things that monkeys do? What do monkeys do that are like what people do? Write down your ideas about monkeys. See if any of them are like what you read in "The Monkey Tree."

One day a hat salesman set up his cart under a large tree by a road where many people traveled. He called out, "Hats for sale. Get your hats here." While keeping an eye on the passing crowd, he did not notice that the tree was full of monkeys.

In order to demonstrate how nice his hats were, he put the finest one on his head. Imagine his astonishment when, in a flash, all the monkeys jumped down around him. He was quite startled as they reached suddenly into his cart with their little hands, and took all the hats and put them on their heads. With another leap they jumped back into the

tree, peering down at the merchant from under the brims of their new hats. He shouted, "Give me my hats back." The monkeys seemed to laugh at him. He was quite sad as he realized that except for the hat on his head, he had nothing to sell.



Then, as he was thinking about his situation, he got angry. He shook his fist at the monkeys and demanded, "You monkeys come down right now." The monkeys just shook their little fists back at him and chattered. The man decided to climb up the tree to get the hats for himself, but the higher he climbed, the higher the monkeys scampered, until they were on the highest branches, which were too thin to support the man's weight.

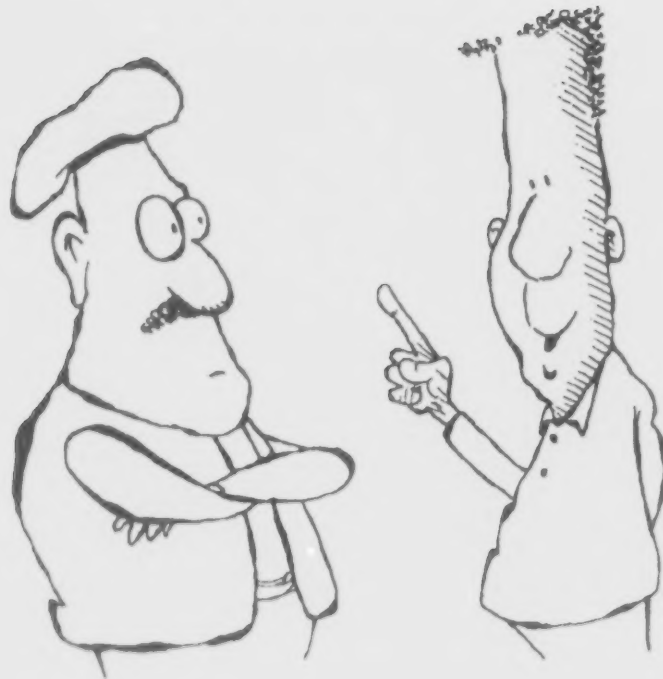
Finally he tried a threat. "If you don't give my hats back at once," he warned them, "I will call Hanuman, the Monkey God, to come and punish you."

The monkeys considered this threat among themselves. "No," they said to each other, "Hanuman* won't come here." So they sat high on their limbs, while tipping their new hats this way and that.

The poor man then say down, sadly holding his head because he could think of nothing else to try. Just then a young man came along. "What seems to be the problem, my friend?"



* Hanuman is the Hindu deity for physical strength and power, often consulted by wrestlers. Therefore, the monkey would think twice before risking his irritation.



The hat salesman explained, "These silly monkeys have taken my hats and are laughing at me."

The young man thought for a moment and said, "I know the solution. If you will give me the hat you are wearing, I will get back all the rest of your hats."

"But this is the only hat I have left," protested the man.

"Nevertheless, if you want the rest of your hats back before it is too late to make a single sale today, you must give me that one." Since he had no choice, the man handed over his last hat, which the young man promptly put on his head.

Then he stepped out into full view of the monkeys and waved at them. They all waved back. Next he lifted the hat high above his head, and the monkeys returned the salute, lifting their hats high in the air too. Finally, he threw his hat down on the ground with great force. The monkeys quickly did the same, and all the hats came showering down out of the tree.

The hat salesman quickly gathered up his hats as the young man walked on wearing both his fine new hat and a big smile.



Things to Do *after* Reading the Story

Can you think of other ways the man might have gotten his hats back? Write another story with another way for the man to get his hats back.



The Big Green Bean of White Oak Hollow

By Theo Elizabeth Gilchrist

Things to Do *before* Reading the Story

Talk about what you would do with a giant green bean. How would you cook a giant green bean? How would it taste? Would it be useful for anything besides eating?

White Oak Hollow that summer was hot and dusty brown. Creeks dried. Dogs whimpered. Cats whined. Even Jed found that doing nothing has lost its fun.

"Take a little bitty snooze 'neath the hickory tree, and zoom up zippy as can be," he sang as he flopped down.

"Zoom up? To what?" his neighbor Cora Jean called over to him.

"Up and down to resting again, busy-dizzy Cora," he answered.

Cora Jean had the only green garden. This year, along with potatoes, tomatoes, onions, and herbs, she had planted string beans. Neighbors came to admire.

"Of course her garden's green," Jed told them. "She's up all night watering. That one will drop someday from too much doing."

"If you dropped, Jed, nobody could tell the difference," Cora Jean snapped back as she hoed and weeded.



"You never mind, Cora," Jed muttered, sprawling out again.

Cora Jean riled him with her working ways. On the other hand, he had built his shack nearby on purpose. Cora grew good stuff. He could easily help himself when her back was turned.



"Come here, Jed. See this!" Cora called. Slowly Jed pushed himself up and ambled to where Cora squatted in her garden. "Look at this bean, Jed."

Growing at the bottom of one of the stalks was a bean a foot long.

"Great catfish, Cora! It's bigger than a cucumber. Probably tough, though. Whack her off.



"No such thing," said Cora. "Everything's got some use, except maybe you, Jed. This bean just might be meant for getting me a blue ribbon at the county fair. And I warn you, Jed." She shook her hoe at him. "When you're stealing my beans, don't you dare take this one."

"Aw, who'd want it? Besides, I don't steal. I just keep your too-muchness from spoiling." He turned and stomped away. "I've got to get to work."

"What work?" Cora called after him.

"Carving walking canes, that's what."

"Is that what you plan to do with all those saplings you hacked down three years ago?"

"Yup."

"You haven't made one cane yet."

"Wood's got to age." Jed slumped down and closed his eyes.

The big bean grew. It swelled like a blimp. Folks came for miles to see it. They climbed on stools and rubbed their hands along its thick, bulging sides.





"That bean's pushing to knock my shack down," Jed said. "It's got to go!"

"Nope," said Cora firmly.

"How will you haul it to the fair? Besides, when it rains there's going to be one mess of a stinking, rotting bean."

Cora sniffed the air and looked skyward. "You think it's going to rain?"

Jed shrugged.

Cora rushed into action. She set a bucket of turpentine in a tub of warm water, added melted beeswax, and slowly mixed it with a long-handled mop.

Jed's eyes bugged out. "Cora, you doing what I think?"

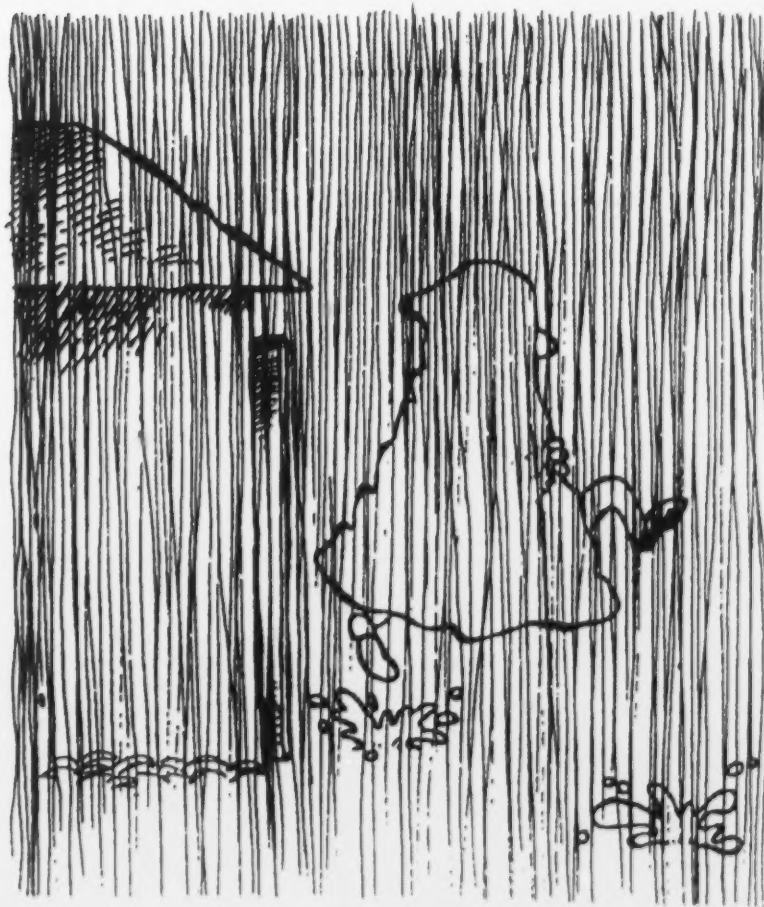
"You bet I am. I'm waterproofing my bean." With her mop she swooshed the mixture over the bean, just as thunder rumbled in the distance.



"It's coming, Cora. At last! Rain!"

It started high up in the mountains. In no time the creeks filled, gushing down the hills. Hurrahs echoed down the hollow. Jed took his rest indoors.

On and on the rain poured. Skies were gray-black. Creeks swelled into angry rivers. Men, women, children, animals rushed by. "We're flooding out!" they shouted. "Everything's going. Hurry, Cora, or you'll drown for sure!"



Draped in oilcloth, Jed stumbled from his shack. "Roof's leaking. Water's got to my bed!" he called.

"You better go, Jed. Hurry."

"You know I hate hurry. What about you, Cora?"

"And leave this bean?" Cora said, holding her umbrella and rubbing her cheek against the bean's side.

"Never knew anyone willing to drown for a bean."

"How about drowning for a snooze? Get on with you, Jed."

"Cora, come on. The water is lapping at my bellybutton. You can't take old green-boy with you."



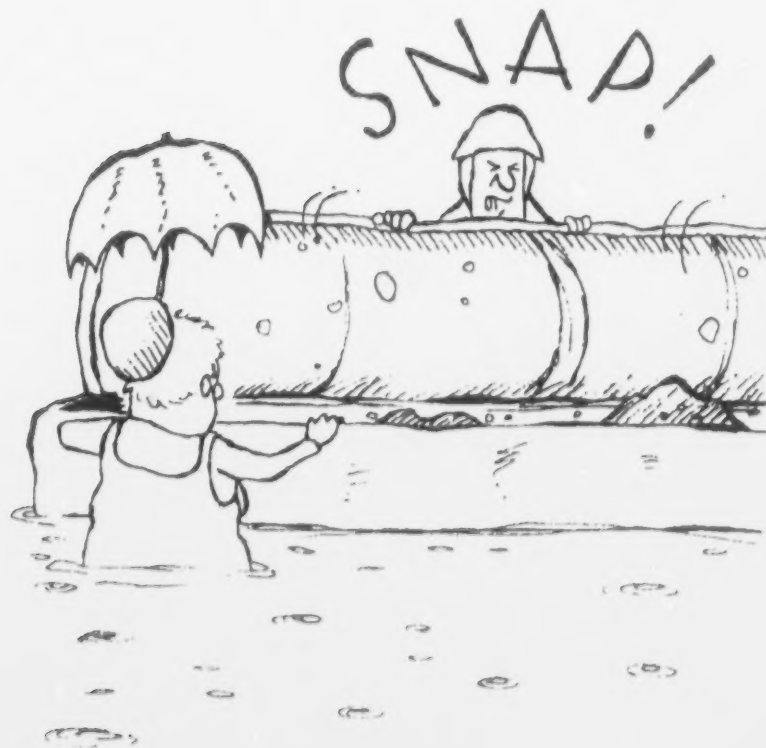
Cora stiffened. "I can't? But I can. Hurry. Get scoops and tools. We got a job here."

Jed left and came back puffing. "Don't ask me to get any more stuff. I barely made it."

"Help me pry this bean open, Jed."

"You're nuts, Cora."

"Move! Move!"



Together they snapped the bean open.

"Scoop her out," Cora called.

They quickly loosened the big seeds and fed them to the churning water. The two halves of shell rose, wriggling to be free.

"Hang on tight, Cora! I'll get your clothesline and tie her to the tree, or we'll lose her for sure."

Jed tied the bean and lashed the sides together. "Look at that. It's a floating bean boat."

"And just in time," Cora said. "I can't stand up against this water much longer. I'll get what food I can. You grab that rooster and those hens off the shed roof." Jed reached for the flapping rooster and put him under the bib of his overalls. Then with a squawking hen under each arm, he waded over and plopped them all into the boat.



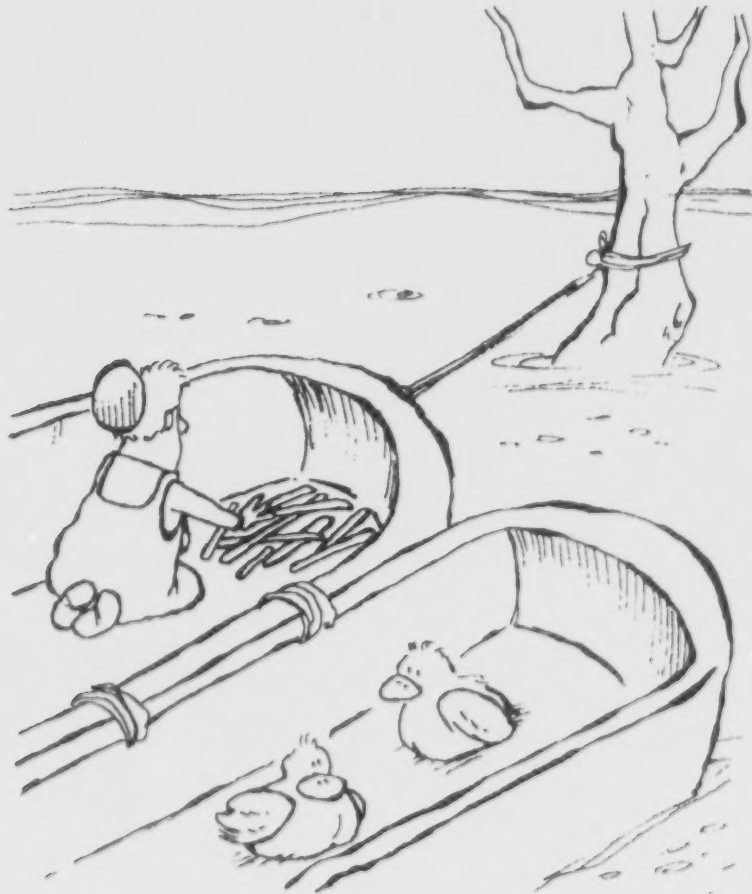
"Ready, Jed? I'll cut her loose."

"Hold it, Cora. I'll get my canes."

Jed splashed back, gasping. "Here—potatoes and the only canes that haven't washed away, but they'll do."

"For what, Jed?

"For poling the boat. It's got no rudder, Cora. We'll be bashed to pieces. Grab a cane up front there. Now cut loose!"



The bean boat surged wildly forward. It twisted for a moment in a brown whirlpool, spun around and caught on a snag. With his pole, Jed pushed the boat free. "Watch that rock, Cora!"

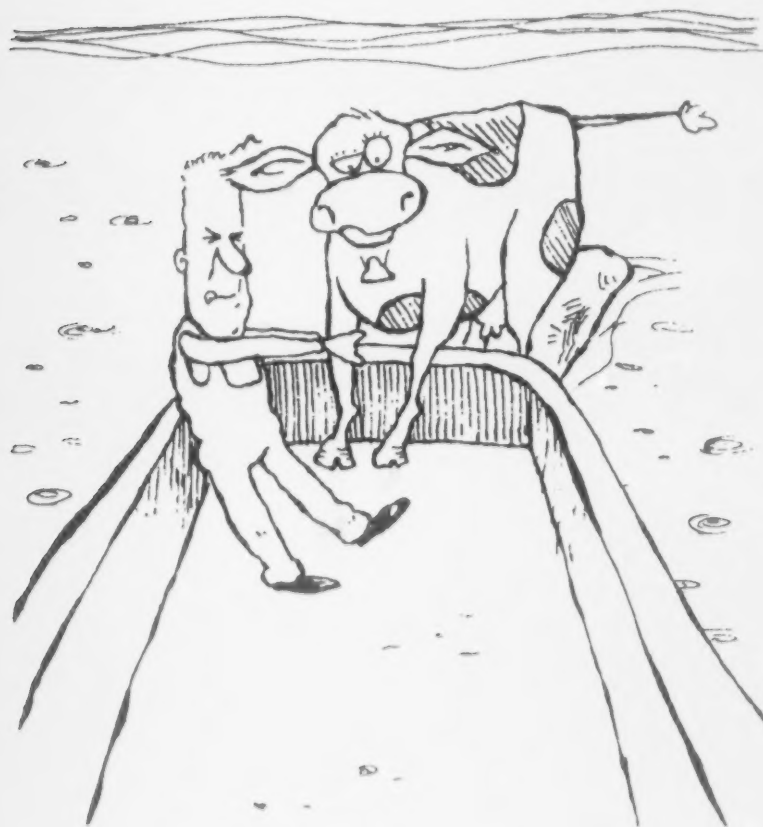
Working on both sides, they pushed, pulled, and swatted along.

"Cow ahead!" Jed shouted. There on a narrow, flat rock, surrounded by water, a cow stood rigid with fear.



"Poor critter can't even lie down," Jed said.
"Let's edge over careful, Cora. That rock may be jagged below."

The boat swung sideways on a big wave, slapping against the rock.



"Come, Bossie, git," Cora demanded. "We got a use for you." The cow froze. The boat tossed.

"Steady the boat, Cora. If I can get her front hoofs, the rear is bound to follow."

Cora eased the boat against the rock. Jed tugged at the cow. "Mooooo," the cow protested, but Jed forced the stiff legs into the boat, and Bossie's rear followed just as the boat surged way from the rock and out again into the angry water.

"Water's leaking in, Cora! That cow stamped a hoof through the bottom of the boat." With one hand Jed scooped water out of the boat. With the other he tried fitting the potatoes into the leak.

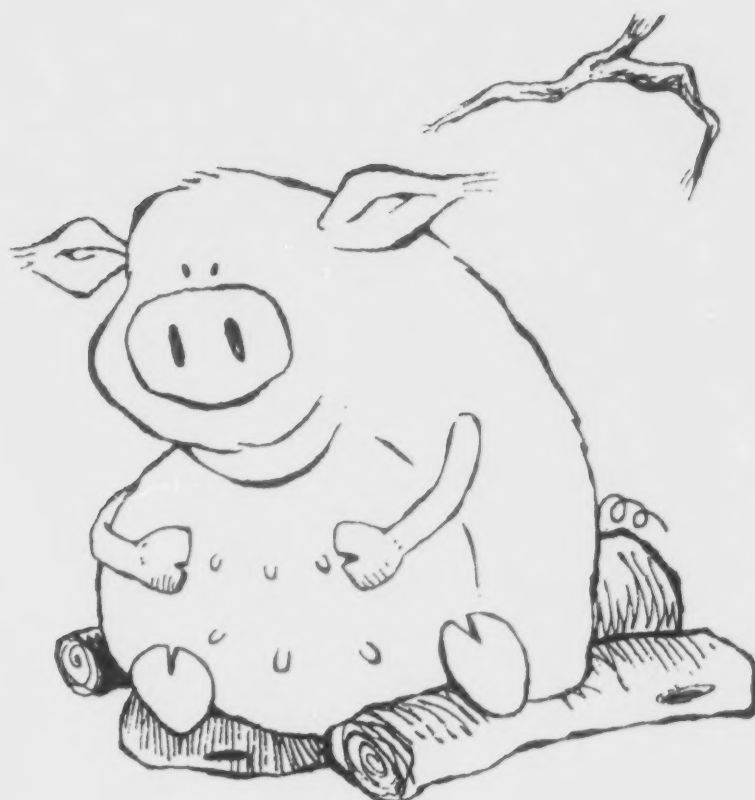


"Thank catfish! Here's one just the size to plug the hole. Cora, it's holding!"

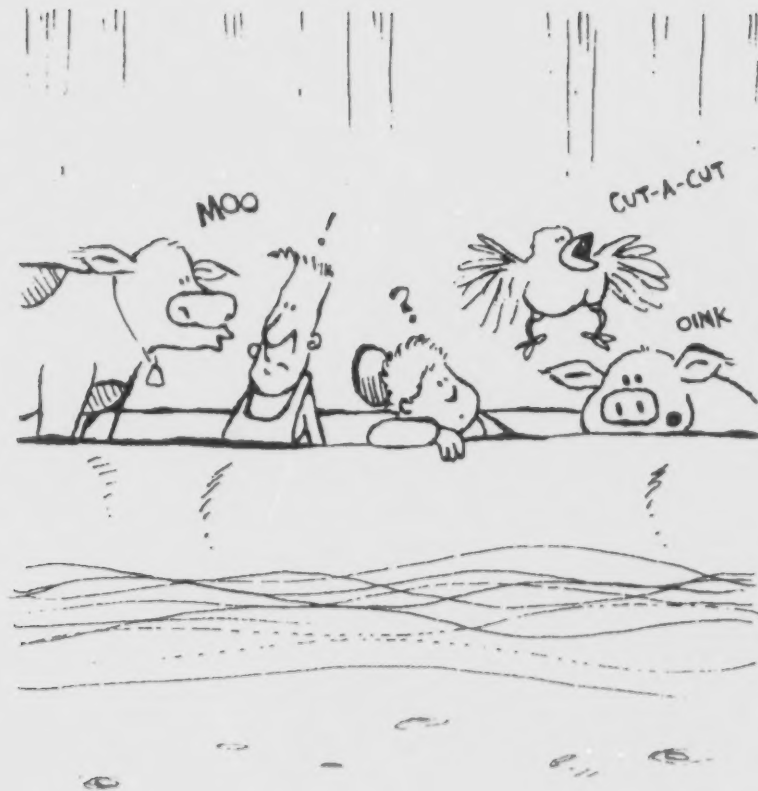
Again they fought to control the boat.

"What's in that tangle of branches and logs, Jed?"

Jed looked. Staring back at him was an enormous sow. "Great catfish, Cora. She's about to farrow and not a bed to rest in! We gotta save her."



The branches tore at the side of the boat. Cora and Jed turned it around and edged up to an opening between logs.



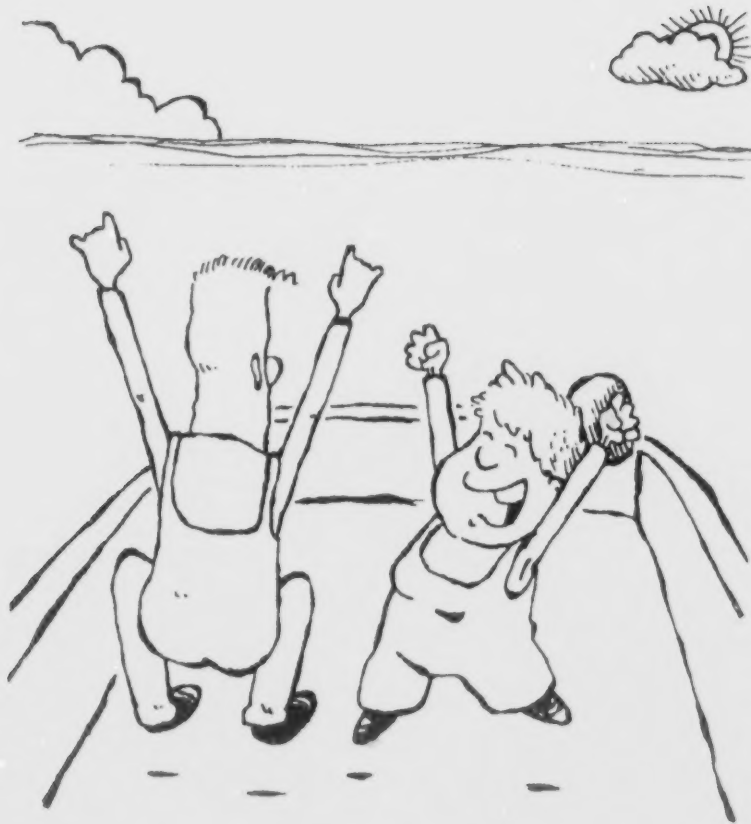
"Here, pig." Jed called. The cow bellowed. The chickens clucked.

"Sow," Cora pleaded, "think of your babies."

The sow raised her head and, with a crunching of branches, waddled up to the boat and stepped in heavily. The boat heaved.

"Moo," the cow complained. "Cut-a-cut" the chickens scolded.

"Quickly, Jed, the branches are breaking apart!" They poled frantically to one side as the logs shot forward.



At last, panting and tired, they reached a plain where the waters spread, losing their fury. The rain slowed.

"Dry land ahead!" Jed called.

"I knew we'd make it."

"Saved by your bean, Cora."

"Saved by your canes, Jed. Yup. Everything's got a use."

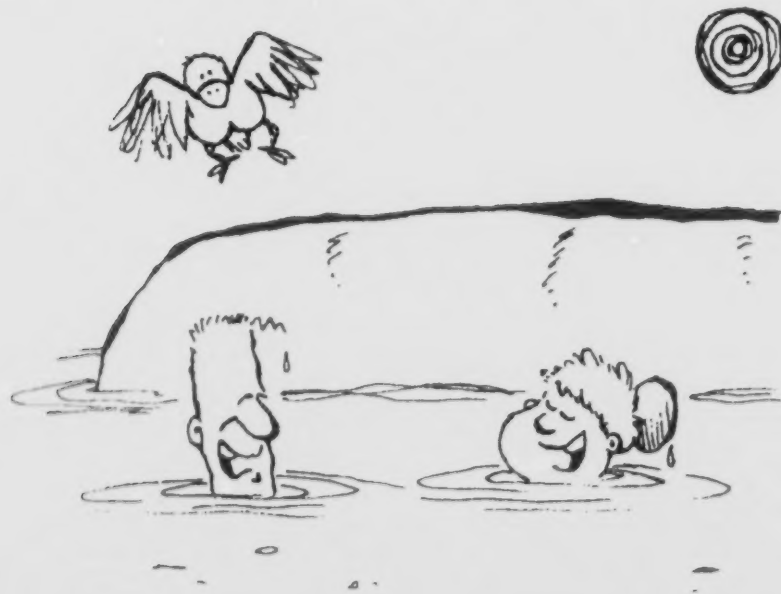
"If we never get back home, Cora, we got enough critters and potatoes to start over."

"Right! And the first thing we'll do, Jed..."

"Do," Jed yelled. "All you think of is do."

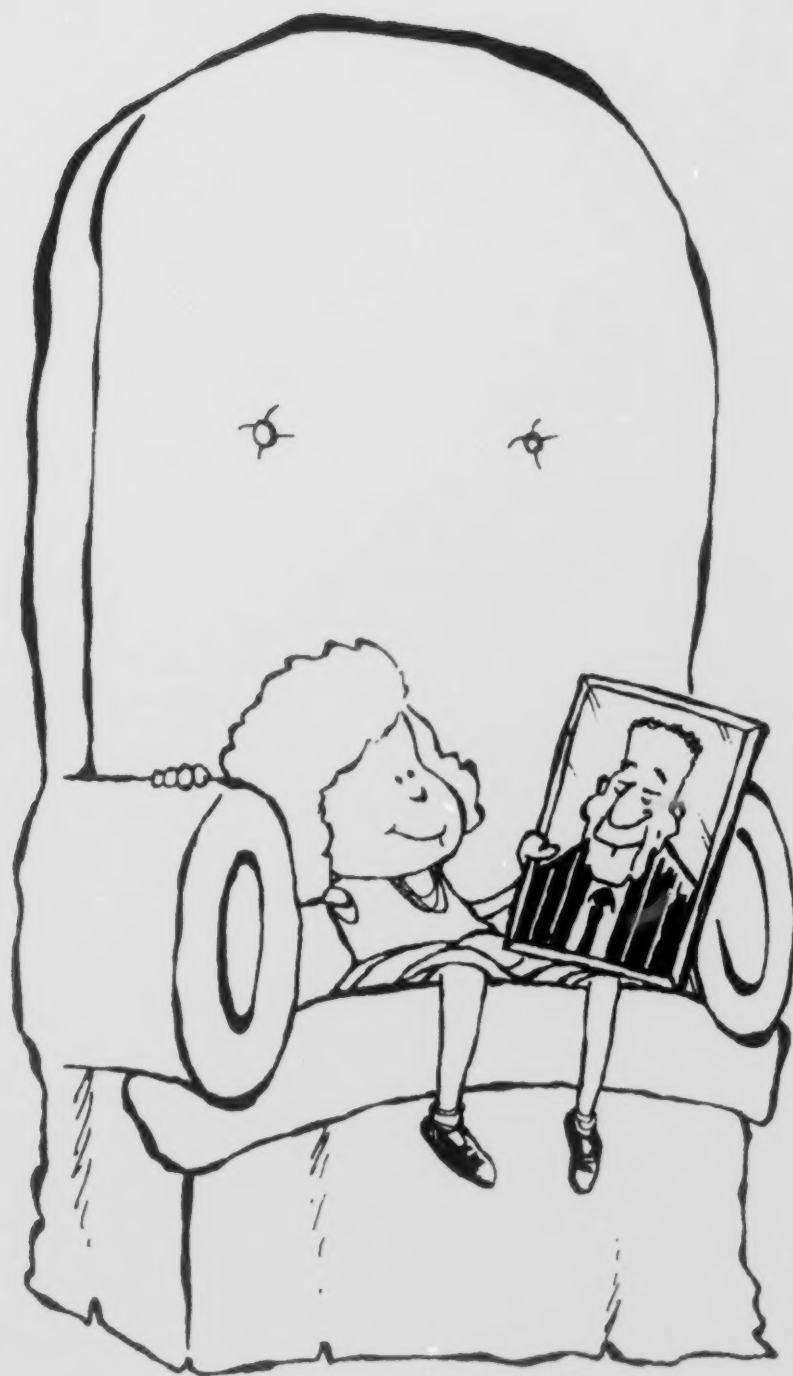
"What we're going to do," Cora sang, "is take a little bitty snooze 'neath the hickory tree, and zoom up zippy as can be."

The two of them sang and laughed so hard, they tipped over the bean as they hit the shore.



Things to Do *after* Reading the Story

Jed and Cora did not like each other until there was an emergency, and they decided to help one another. Try to think of a way you could help someone you do not like very well. What would you do to help this person?



Uncle Edgar and the President's Eye

By Linda Allen

Things to Do *before* Reading the Story

Sometimes your friends or relatives may tell interesting stories and share fun secrets. Talk together about a time when you told a story or secret to a friend or relative, or listened to one.

Did I ever tell you about my Uncle Edgar? He's Mom's uncle, really, so that makes him my great uncle Edgar, but I never call him that. He's very old—so old that he can remember a time when there were no such things as automobiles.

Mom says he exaggerates. She says he's a bad influence on me and if I listen to everything he says, I'll never be any good at history. But he ought to know if he helped design the first airship. And I don't care whether he was exaggerating or not when he told me that his mother came over from England on the Mayflower; the way he told it, it was a great story.



We go to visit every spring. He lives in a creaky old house with a big, wild garden around it, like a jungle. He says there are leopards in there. He says if I don't bother them, they won't bother me, so I don't. They have a lair underneath his shed, and that's where they go when they see me coming. Uncle Edgar feeds them spaghetti every night, but I can't watch because it's past my bedtime.

The last time we went visiting, he was looking for something. At first he wouldn't say what it was. He just kept opening drawers and banging them shut and muttering to himself. "Why don't you tell us what you've lost, Uncle Edgar?" Mom said.

"Then we can help you look for it."

But he wouldn't. He said if he told her, she wouldn't believe him, so she went off to have her hair done.

I watched him for a little while, then I said, "I'd believe you, Uncle Edgar."

"Would you?" he said.

"Yes, I would," I said.

"Well, I don't know. It isn't the sort of thing I'd like people to hear about. If it ever got out that it was in my possession, they'd all be around here—the FBI, newspaper reporters, TV interviewers, the lot."





"What is it?" I asked. I was getting excited. "It must be something special."

"Oh, it's special all right," he said.

"Stolen jewels?" I asked.

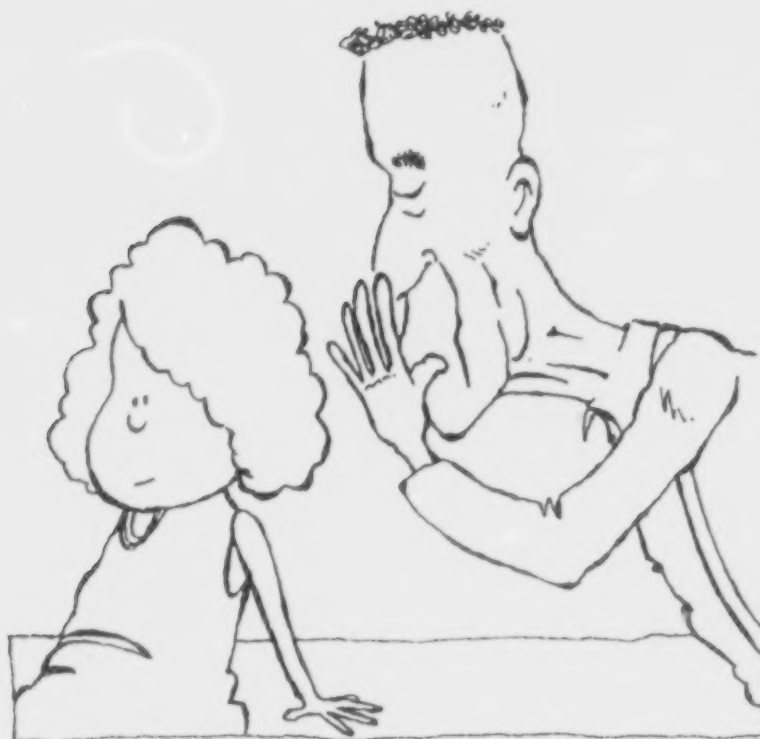
"Not this time," he replied—and don't ask what he meant by that.

"Please," I begged, "let me help you look for it. I won't say a word to Mom."

"Promise?" he said.

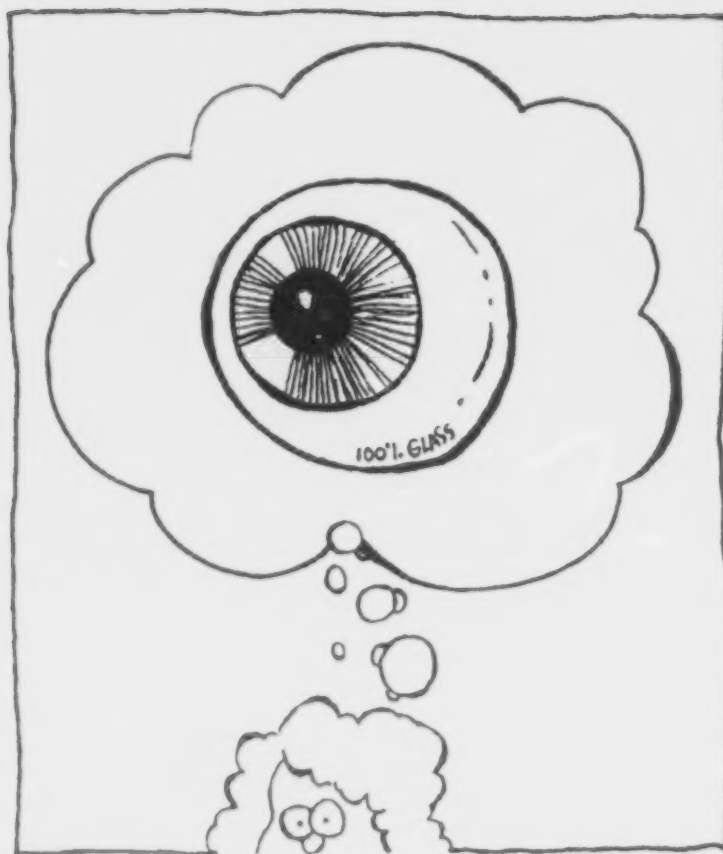
"Cross my heart and hope to die."

He bent forward and whispered, "It's something that belonged to the president."



"The President of the United States!" I yelled.

"Shh! Keep your voice down," he hissed. Then he told me what it was.



"It's a glass eye. A blue one. People with only one eye used to wear them—maybe they still do."

"I didn't know the president had only one eye," I said. "He looks all right to me."

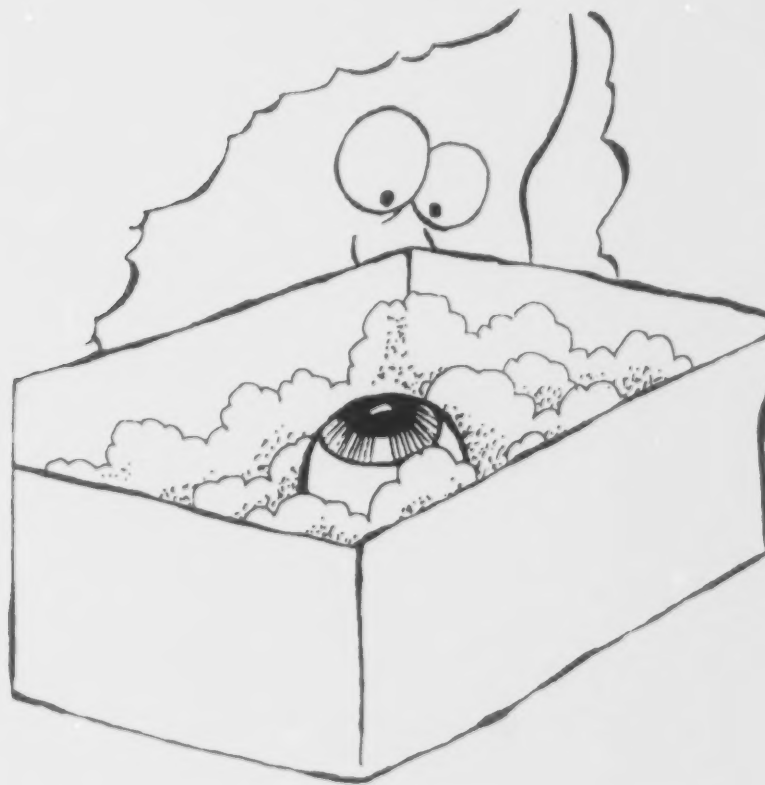
"Not this president. Way back, nine or ten presidents ago."

"Which one was it?"

"I'm not at liberty to say."

And then I knew it was going to be an interesting story. I'd never been told at school that one of our presidents had a glass eye, but that just goes to show that teachers don't know everything. We searched in all the drawers downstairs and then went upstairs where we found all sorts of wonderful things, like the fossilized egg of the extinct Goozlebird and some lace that had belonged to Marie Antoinette.

Finally we found the glass eye. It was in a box, wrapped in cotton. I stared and stared at the eye, and it stared right back at me. It looked so real that I expected it to wink. I asked Uncle Edgar how he came to have it.



"Hush," he said, tucking it into his waistcoat pocket. "Not here. There might be hidden microphones, considering the life I've led."

"Let's go to the park, and I'll tell you all about it."



We found a bench where it was quiet, and he began his story. When he was about my age, he said, he happened to be at a big railway station when the president was passing through. The president had a bodyguard with him, and just as they were passing the spot where Uncle Edgar was standing, a spark from the engine flew into the bodyguard's eye, nearly blinding him.

Uncle Edgar saw the president glance along the platform, where two big, ugly men were approaching. Immediately, the president turned to Uncle Edgar, and that was when my uncle noticed that he had a glass eye. In a flash, the president blinked out the eye and wrapped it in a handkerchief. "Quick!" he said to Uncle Edgar. "Take this to SID. Hurry, those two men mustn't get hold of it."



Well, at once Uncle Edgar knew that SID stood for Special Intelligence Department, so he ran off as fast as he could. He was the best runner in his school in those days and he had no difficulty in shaking the two men off. When he got to the Special Intelligence Department, he was taken to an office deep underground where a beautiful lady asked him questions and gave him a drink of lemonade.



Uncle Edgar took the glass eye out of his pocket and showed it to me. "You see the hollow in the back?" he said. "That's where the president's secret code was kept. Nobody knew about it except himself, the beautiful lady, and me. It was all written down on a tiny disk that the lady put under a microscope to read. She swore me to secrecy and told me to go home and behave as if nothing had happened." Uncle Edgar looked me straight in the eye and went on, "And from that day to this, I've never breathed a word of it."

"But why did she let you keep the eye?" I asked. "Didn't the president want it any more?"

“Ah, yes,” he said, “that’s what I’m coming to. She didn’t let me keep it—not then. It was some time afterward. I was sitting on a bench in the park—it might have been this very bench, yes, I do believe it was—when I saw the beautiful lady again. As she approached me, she reined in her horse—his name was Vulcan—and threw a little package into my hands. ‘With the president’s compliments,’ she said. ‘He wants you to have this as a memento of the day on which you gave him such valuable assistance. He has several more, so nobody will ever know. Goodbye, my friend. We shall never forget what you did.’ And, of course, it was the president’s eye.”



"Wow!" I said. But what happened next really left me speechless.

Uncle Edgar placed the glass eye in my hand. It was a very solemn moment. "I'm getting old," he said, "and who knows what might happen after I'm gone? I'd like you to have it, for my sake."

I'd just put it carefully away in my pocket when Mom came by on her way back from the hairdresser. "Did you find what you were looking for?" she asked Uncle Edgar.



"Oh, yes," he replied with a significant glance at me, "but it was nothing important, was it?"

"No, not really," I said, "Nothing important at all."



Things to Do *after* Reading the Story

Do you know someone like Uncle Edgar? What are they like? Do they sometimes exaggerate or make up stories? Talk about a time when your mom or dad told you they didn't want you to spend time with someone. Do you understand from reading this story why your parent decided this? Explain.

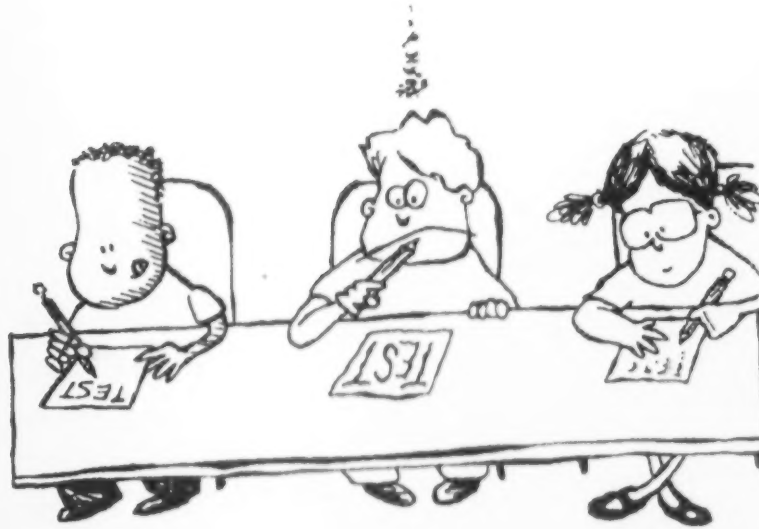
**We hope you have had fun
with these stories!**

Part II

Guidelines for Parents

Stress Affects Your Child's Learning

Can you remember facing a test for which you were not well prepared? Most of us remember having those feelings. Our bodies tensed up and our minds seemed to forget even the things we thought we knew. Some of us struggled through those tests



with great frustration, feeling that we had failed, or at best, had done poorly. Others of us were so fearful of the consequences that we tried to cheat. We slipped notes inside our shirt sleeves or peeked at our neighbor's paper.

Formal tests in school often bring on stressful feelings. But we and our children are tested everyday. When the teacher calls on us to give answers or to explain our thoughts, there is pressure to perform. Some people react so negatively to those opportunities to perform in public that they freeze and refuse to respond. In their minds it is better to get a poor grade than to submit one's ideas to public ridicule.



But those pressure-filled situations are not limited to school. Adult life, too, brings us face-to-face with pressures that can raise our blood pressure and cause us to act in negative ways. A complaining customer, or a row of figures that doesn't balance, or a boss who always seems to



breathe down our necks are a few examples of situations that can lead us to act negatively. A friend of mine, for instance, thought that his boss and his fellow workers were always criticizing him. As a result, he wrecked a bulldozer and quit a good-paying job. He said there was too much stress there for him to survive.

What causes stress? We do.

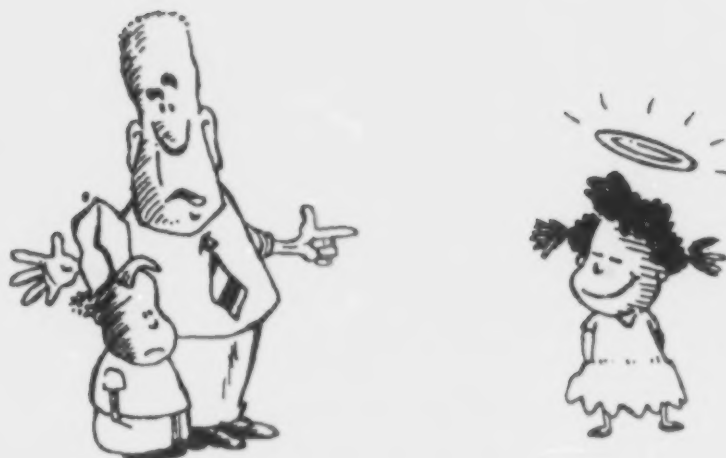
School, jobs, the family, our friends, and the news media all put pressure on us. They all ask us to perform, to give public evidence that we can do our jobs and can live responsible lives. But that's just normal daily pressure. Everyone faces daily pressure. How we react to that pressure determines our stress level. In other words, the feeling of stress,

the feeling of fear or panic, is a feeling that we create ourselves. Evidence for the truth of this statement can be found in the ways that different people react to the same moment of pressure. In class, some children will collapse in a jumble of tears when faced with a test. Others will tackle the test with energy and self-confidence. Same test. Same external pressure. Very different levels of stress, very different kinds of reactions.

It is not always clear why some children rise to meet the pressure of school while others freeze or do a poor job. Unwise parents may try to shield



their children from all external pressure, then children may never learn how to handle it. Other parents may expect too much of their children. They may expect their children to perform far beyond their abilities, thus pressuring them to do things that they cannot perform. Or children may sense extreme anxiety in their parents when the parents



feel their children will not measure up to others. That usually means that the parent is afraid of being embarrassed because the child is not a star. Yes, a parent can actually exert pressure that the child does not know how to handle. Therefore, the child builds stress and fear that work against good performance.

We don't want to imply that parents are the only cause of stressful reactions in their children. All sorts of pain, illness, ridicule from other children, and other emotional strains may lead your child to see almost any pressure as more than he or she can stand. Moving to a new school, divorce, being excluded from a popular group, an abusive relative—all kinds of negative events can make a child vulnerable and less able to deal with other daily pressures. Thus the child creates within himself a level of stress for daily pressures that is inappropriate and hurtful.

In other words, anything that adds pressure to the child or to the parent creates an opportunity for the individual to build stress so it hinders performance instead of helping it. As the world changes at a faster and faster pace, each of us gets pressure from more and more segments of our life. Our jobs change, we move, we hear about war, we read about competition with other countries, we argue with a neighbor about our space, we fear we won't make a team or get a promotion, we fear the environment isn't safe. All kinds of events and worries in modern life add to the pressures on us and on our children. You can see, then, how easy it is for us to turn these many different pressures into a growing sense of stress.



Signs of Stress in Children

To help your child deal with stress, first learn to recognize its signs. For example, some children withdraw from activities they previously enjoyed; some refuse to respond or to interact with others; some begin to act like little children again; some blame others for all their problems—other children, the teacher, bad light in the classroom, and so on. Some children begin to fear everything associated with school and may even be unable to board the school bus or may have a fit of anger about going to school. In some children, feelings of



stress provoke physical symptoms: headaches, stomach cramps, vomiting, bed wetting, frequent nightmares, and so on.

These signs of stress in children should be taken seriously because they can lead to serious problems in school and in the child's attitude toward life.

Here are some of the things that you can do to reduce or prevent stress:

First, tell your child that you have noticed that something is bothering her. Children need to know that someone recognizes that they have a problem and that you care enough to work on it.

Second, try to put as much order in your child's life as you can. A sense of order helps develop a sense of control, a sense of competency. Provide a place for study, for example, where books, paper, and pen are handy. Then help your child set aside



specific times for school work. The same kind of orderliness in other aspects of life may also be helpful. This means that meals, chores, entertainment, and bedtime may need to be planned with a degree of regularity, so the child begins to gain control over himself through the orderliness of his environment.

Third, give your child regular encouragement about the things that he does well. Praise his efforts and remind him that competence comes from many repetitions. He can reduce stressful feelings by talking with you or a teacher about pressure and ways to reduce it. People can learn to reduce their feelings of stress.

Fourth, help your child build friendships that will support him. Encourage your child to invite friends to the house, people who will enjoy similar activities and who will boost your child's self-esteem.

Fifth, be a good listener. Give your child a chance to express his or her feelings. You may want to say: "You look like you've had a bad day. Do you want to talk about it?" Then help your child define the problem.



Sixth, hugs and signs of affection are always beneficial.



Seventh, try to reassure your child that all children have pressure and fears. He is not alone. It is important for your child to realize that he can gain control of most of his feelings by realizing that they are *his* feelings. Therefore, he should not blame other people or the circumstances for his anxiety. With your help, and perhaps the help of teachers and other professionals, he can learn to control any negative, stressful feelings that he has.

As you work with your children, please treat their fears and anxieties with respect. They are real fears to your children, and those feelings may in fact hinder schoolwork and make friendships difficult. You can't fight your children's battles, but you can act as an ally, and you can enlist teachers or counselors in the battle as well.

Each of us has our own strengths and weaknesses. As much as possible, focus on your child's strengths. Offer praise and encouragement so your child will see that through his or her strengths, he can build self-esteem and reduce harmful stress. In the same light, recognize your child's weaknesses and do not demand that your child do things that will only disappoint both of you.



When it is helpful, remind your children that pressures in life can either be used to stimulate the effort needed to succeed or to build fears and anxieties. How they respond is up to the individual. Together, you and your children can learn to respond in healthy, positive ways to pressures that we all feel.

Questions about Stress and School

All parents have questions and need answers about their children. Here are some questions that other parents have asked concerning stress.

My son becomes very upset when he thinks he doesn't know something. Often he remarks that "the other kids are smarter than I am." What can we do to build his confidence and help him overcome this anxiety?

Kids change so quickly they sometimes forget how much they have learned. As a parent, you can help your son build self-esteem by pointing out all the new things he *does* know.





You might get out an old favorite book and say, "Remember when you had trouble reading this book?" Or if your child is struggling with long division, say, "Remember when you couldn't even add 6 plus 9?"

Many children who experience difficulty learning are subjected to harsh words or are criticized by parents, teachers, and peers. Many of these youngsters develop feelings of anxiety because they sense they have no control over what happens to them during learning. To make matters worse, many of these children feel guilty and are emotionally upset because they think they have let their parents or teachers down.

Before positive changes can occur, you and your son must become aware of the problems that are causing the stress and anxiety. Talk with your son about school. Be sure to ask your son what he likes about school or what he thinks he is good at. Share with your son things you think he does well. Talk about the things that he would like to improve or things he is having trouble with at school—classmates, assignments, teachers, or activities outside of school. Discuss with your son ways he can deal with things that are upsetting to him. Let him know that he does not have to face his problems alone.

It may be necessary to share your son's anxiety about school with his teacher. The teacher's role is crucial in creating an instructional environment that leads to your child's success.



Explain to your son that learning does involve some degree of stress; even adults feel tension when they are confronted with unfamiliar things. Parents and teachers cannot always prevent stress, but they can help a child to cope when it occurs. Encourage him to ask for help when he doesn't understand something or to reread directions and information that are not clear to him. Provide the kind of support at home that will help your son become confident. Take time each evening to discuss things that have happened at school. Become involved in the homework that your son brings home. Offer praise for the things your child has accomplished, and provide support when your child is having difficulty.



We all feel encouraged when we realize we are making progress. A few minutes spent talking with your son about his accomplishments can build self-esteem and confidence that is necessary for success in school.

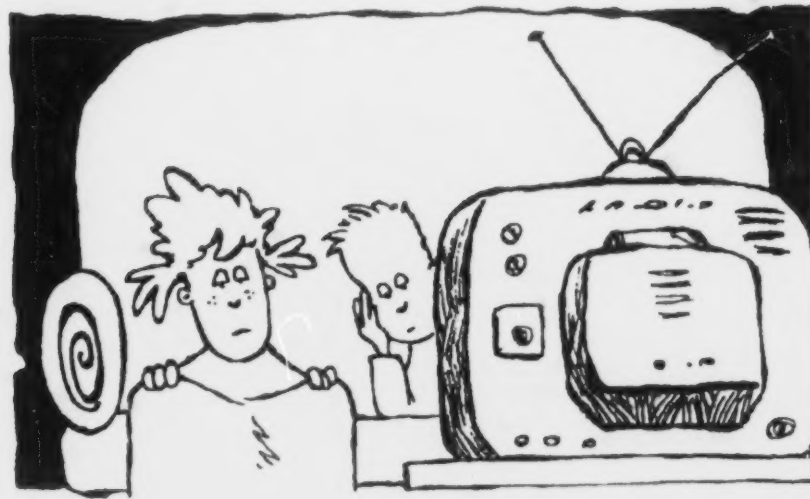
I don't like sending my children to school in a hurried, frantic way. Getting them all off to school on time—packing lunches, getting breakfast, finishing forgotten homework, making sure they have everything they need—can be very stressful for all of us. What can we do to reduce that “morning rush hour?”

In many homes, the morning scene looks like something from “America’s Funniest Home Videos!” Kids (and even some parents) fly out the door, eating their breakfast as they run for the bus. Papers fly out of their backpacks or don’t even make it into the backpacks!



Let's face it—not all of us are morning people. But children do need to learn to get to places on time and be ready to go to work. Here are some suggestions for eliminating “morning rush hour” at your house:

First, help your children establish good habits. Make sure they hang up their coats as they walk in the door. Give each child a place to keep boots, hats, gloves, and school bags so they are easy to find come the next morning. Second, schedule a regular homework time, and establish a regular bedtime. Kids who zonk out on the couch watching a TV



program at 11:00 at night can't rise or shine the next morning. Third, help your children learn to be responsible for getting themselves up in the morning. Provide an alarm clock for each bedroom or child. It may help to set everyone's alarm clock fifteen minutes earlier. Even a few extra minutes can make a real difference. Creating a sense of order is a good way to start.

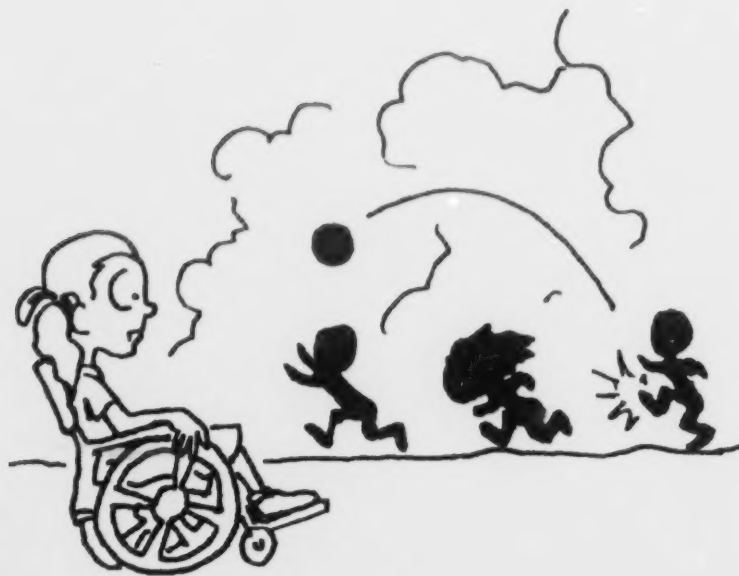
Fourth, a successful morning begins at night. Before your children go to bed, have them lay out everything they will need for school. This is a good

time to make sure everyone has lunch money, homework, and any permission slips that require parent signatures. Also, have them select the clothes they will wear the next day.

Oh, by the way, before everyone leaves, take a second to say, "I love you" and "Have a good day" to each child. Nothing will get their day...and yours...off to a better start.

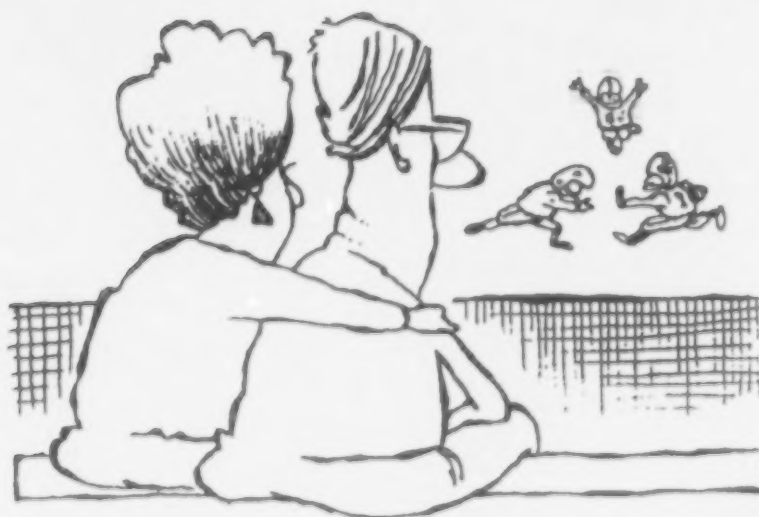
Our daughter has some learning difficulties. I sometimes feel this contributes to the trouble she has making friends. How can we support her in getting through some of these tough times?

The pressure to be accepted and liked by others is felt by all children, typical or not. However, the special child often has more difficulty in



establishing friendships and therefore has a greater chance of feeling left out. Some special children attend schools or programs outside of the neighborhood, which makes the task of making friends even tougher. Feelings of rejection or exclusion, combined with not living up to expectations at school, can all build up and contribute to unhealthy stressful feelings.

Having a friend—someone with whom you can share confidences or enjoy similar pastimes—creates a feeling of self-worth that can reduce school stress. Help your daughter make friends by encouraging her to invite children to your home. It is worth the extra effort on your part.



I want our children to do well in school. How can I encourage them to do their best without putting too much pressure on them to excel in school?

A recent national survey asked children about their biggest worry. Kids said it is the intense pressure to do well in school. Twenty four percent of the young people said that "doing well" in school and in sports is what they worry about most.

We want to support our children's desire to do well, but we may need to rethink the kinds of messages we give them. For instance:

When you watch your children in athletic events, do you criticize their performance afterwards? Or do you try to focus on the fun of participating in the event?

What happens when your children bring home a test? Do you first talk about the questions they got wrong? Or do you look for what they got right or did well?

How about when your children help you with a job around the house? Do you emphasize the things they need to do better? Or do you thank them for their help and talk about one thing they did especially well?

Have conversations with your children that support what they are doing in school and in other activities. Focus on your children's strengths—what they have accomplished—rather than on what they have not been able to do successfully. Take every genuine opportunity to praise their efforts. This positive approach will show your children that you appreciate the good things they do. There is no better way to keep them sailing ahead on an even keel.



I like going over the papers and tests my daughter brings home from school, but she doesn't like doing this. Should I push this?

Your daughter can learn a lot from a test or an assignment—even after it's graded and handed back. A test can show where she had difficulty and, perhaps, why. This is especially important in subjects or skills that build on earlier learning. For example, kids who can't multiply and divide won't be able to understand fractions.

When your daughter brings home a graded test paper, sit down and discuss it. Talk about the right answers as well as the wrong answers. Praise your daughter for what she has done well. When you see a wrong answer, ask your child to explain why she answered as she did. Sometimes children know the right answer, but express it incorrectly. Other times, they may need to review some material.

It helps to talk about how well your daughter used her time during the test. Did she finish? If so, suggest that she spend some time after she finishes to check her work. Did guessing help? Helping children learn to take tests builds confidence the next time. Going over work in this way helps your daughter establish study habits that can help her when she works independently.

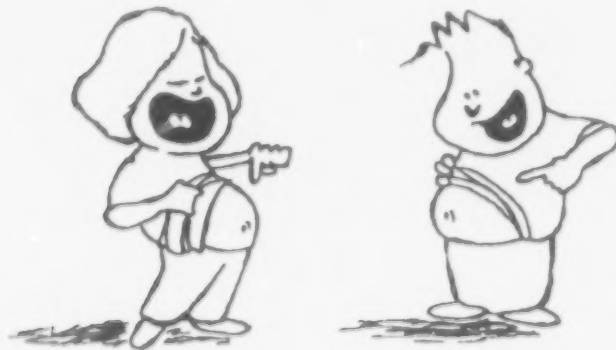
Finally, look to see what the teacher has written on the test paper. Are there any suggestions for improvement? If you have any questions, be sure to contact your daughter's teacher.



Activities to Help Cope with Stress

Use some of the following activities to help your child learn how to deal with stress.

- ❖ Exercise increases the heart rate and stimulates the circulatory system, which helps the body reduce the effects of stress naturally. If you or your child are feeling pressured, upset, sad, or angry, try going for a long, brisk walk, or doing some aerobic exercises.
- ❖ “Laughter is the best medicine” may be an old saying, but there is truth in it. When you laugh, chemicals are released in your body that help you feel more relaxed. When life gets hectic, watch a funny slapstick comedy or read some comics or a joke book with your children and have a good belly-laugh together.





- ❖ Help your child learn to control herself. When reacting to stressful situations, teach her to close her eyes and count slowly to ten before she says or does anything.
- ❖ Being able to express our feelings can sometimes reduce the stress that we feel. You can encourage your child to talk to you, or to someone else he trusts, about what is bothering him. Or suggest that he write down his feelings and thoughts in a diary.

Books for Parents and Children

We have put together lists of books for parents and children. Several of the books are about children who are experiencing some type of stress in their lives. We encourage you to take the time to read a few of these books with your child.



Books for Parents

Books to Help Children Cope with Separation and Loss by Joanne E. Bernstein. Offers ideas on using books to help children cope with death, divorce, separation, desertion, serious illness, war and displacement, foster care, step-parents, adoption, homelessness, new siblings, a new school, or a new neighborhood. Gives an extensive list of books with description, reading level, and interest level. Includes a list of resources for adults.

The Divorce Workbook: A Guide for Kids and Families by Sally Blakeslee Ives and others. A workbook to help children express and explore their fears and feelings about divorce by reading, writing, talking, and drawing. Covers marriage, separation, divorce, emotions, and ways children can help themselves cope. Explains the "legal stuff" such as custody, child support, and visitation.

Helping Children Cope with Stress by Avis Brenner. Describes the range of stresses children face and gives different strategies to help them cope. Topics include childhood stress; one-parent, two-parent, and multi-parent families; separation; death; adoption; divorce; physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; neglect; and living with an alcoholic parent.

Books to Read Together

Ages 4-6

Where is Daddy? The Story of Divorce by Beth Goff. Janeydear lived in her house with her daddy, mommy, and her dog named Funny. Then



her parents get a divorce and Janeydear becomes sad and upset. Her parents help her to understand, and she learns to be happy again.

Everett Anderson's Goodbye by Lucille Clifton.

Everett Anderson is struggling through the different stages of grief after his father dies. Everett comes to understand that even though his father is gone, his father's love will always be with him.

Michael in the Dark by Alison Coles. When Michael's parents go out for the evening and leave him with a new babysitter who turns out the light, he becomes so frightened he cannot fall asleep. Then his mother turns on the light to show him what is making the scary shapes in the dark, and he is able to go to sleep.

Ages 6-8

Everett Anderson's Nine Month Long by Lucille Clifton. First Everett's Mom marries Mr. Perry, and now they are going to have a new baby in their family. Everett is a little wary about having a new brother or sister, until Evelyn arrives and fills their home with joy.



Only Six More Days by Marisabina Russo. Ben is counting down the days to his birthday and it is driving his older sister Molly crazy. Molly finally decides to help Ben celebrate, but only after she counts down the days until her own birthday.

How Many Stars in the Sky? by Lenny Hort. Mama is away one night, and her son cannot sleep. Then the boy finds that his daddy hasn't been able to sleep either. Together they set off into the night on a journey of discovery.

Ages 8-10

The Washout by Carol Carrick. When a summer storm washes out the road, Christopher and his dog Ben row across the lake for help. Christopher stays calm in the face of danger and manages to survive and find help.



Annie and the Old One by Miska Miles. Annie tries to make time stand still so that her aged grandmother will not die. She eventually comes to understand that life and death are both part of an ongoing cycle.



Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley. Badger is a dear friend to his neighbors and he teaches each one of them something special. When Badger dies, his friends gather to share their memories of Badger and the gifts he gave to them.

Books for Your Children to Read by Themselves

Ages 4-6

Frog on His Own by Mercer Mayer. Follow the adventures of this frog through the park. Find out what happens when he leaves his friends to strike out on his own. (A wordless book.)

Shadows and Reflections by Tana Hoban. A collection of photographs displays the shadows and reflections of various objects, animals, and people.



When the New Baby Comes, I'm Moving Out by Martha Alexander. A young child does not like the idea of a new baby coming to his house to live. He does not want to share his things or his family. After his mother shows him how much he means to her and explains the neat things a "big brother" gets to do, he decides a new baby will be terrific.

Ages 6-8

Harriet's Recital by Nancy Carlson. Harriet loves her ballet class, but hates the thought of a recital. She overcomes her stage fright, dances well, and enjoys the recital.

Hunches in Bunches by Dr. Seuss. Explores the frustration and confusion that occurs during decision-making by using humorous rhyme. Each "hunch" tries to help the character make up his mind about what he wants to do.

Horace by Holly Keller. Horace has spots and all the members of his adopted family have stripes. After searching for a family who look just like him, Horace decides that being part of a family depends on how you feel, not how you look.



Ages 8-10

The Berenstain Bears' Moving Day by Stan and Jan Berenstain. The bear family decides to move from their cozy cave home to a new house in the valley. Brother Bear isn't sure if he will be happy and feels anxious about the move. Then they move in, and the new house becomes their home.



Harry and Willy and Carrothead by Judith Caseley. Oscar's hair is the color of carrots, and his friend Harry doesn't have a left hand. Together they become friends with Willy and they all overcome some of their prejudices about appearances.

The Sorely Trying Day by Russell and Lillian Hoban. Father comes home after having a bad day and discovers Mother is also having a bad day, because of the poor behavior of the children and their pets. They all make up and feel much better afterward.

Magazines

Also ask the librarian for the following magazines for children:

Child Life

Creative Kids

Cricket

Highlights for Children

Humpty Dumpty Magazine

Jack and Jill

Kid City

Kids Discover

Let's Find Out

*New Moon: The Magazine for Girls and
Their Dreams*

Owl: The Discovery Magazine for Kids

Scholastic Sprint

Time for Kids

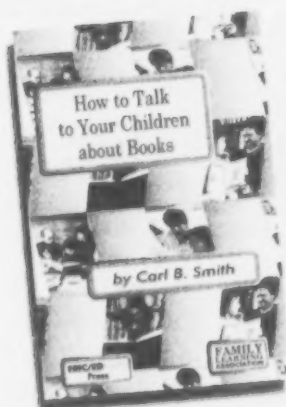
Turtle Magazine for Preschool Kids

Young Scholar

YES Magazine

Zoobooks

**If you found this book useful,
please try these other helpful books !**

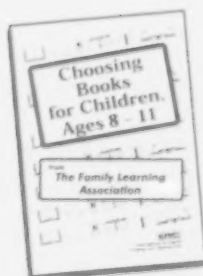
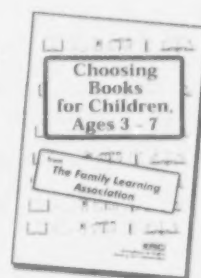


**How to Talk to Your Children
about Books** by Carl B. Smith

Start a conversation that will last a lifetime. This book teaches you five easy techniques to prompt book discussions, guidelines for selecting books, how to make it a two-way exchange, plus motivation, values, and making it fun!

Choosing Books for Children, Ages 3 to 7

Use this resource to appeal to a variety of interests in your kindergarten to primary-age children. Filled with great tips for keeping book conversations going, this book pinpoints a vast array of age-appropriate reading materials.

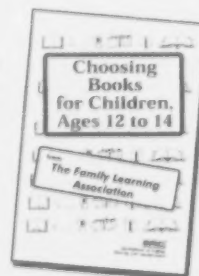


Choosing Books for Children, Ages 8 to 11

Quick summaries of a huge collection of titles will make it easy to provide good reading for your pre-teens. Top-notch authors, relevant themes, and sensitive issues make this a good companion at the library or bookstore.

Choosing Books for Children, Ages 12 to 14

Let literature open up discussion about some of the difficult issues your teen is experiencing. Includes a special section on communicating about books through writing and journaling.



For information about these and other helpful books, contact

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